



Supervised Agricultural Experience

Journalism Style Guidelines

Whenever you write a press release or an article for a news-related purpose, you should use basic Associated Press style. In summary, AP style provides uniform guidelines that all journalists use with regard to abbreviations, capitalization, titles, acronyms, numbers, punctuation, etc. in news copy. Every agriculture teacher should have a copy of *The Associated Press Stylebook*. If you do not, please get one. You'll refer to it frequently for news-related writing.

Following is information from the "Guide to AP Style" by Dr. Michael Sweeney at Utah State University (www.usu.edu/journalism/faculty/sweeney/resources/ap.htm). This provides a good summary of some of the most frequently referenced journalism guidelines.

- **a, an** — You use the article "an" in front of words that sound as if they begin with a vowel, regardless of how they are spelled. Example: "I have an SAE that is rewarding."
- **academic degrees** — Put an apostrophe in bachelor's degree and master's degree. This is to show possession. The degree belongs to the bachelor or master (that's you). Even when shortened to bachelor's and master's (no "degree" afterward), keep the apostrophe.
- **addresses** — Abbreviate the words street, avenue and boulevard (think S-A-B), but only if they appear after a numbered address. Also abbreviate compass directions, but only if they appear with a numbered address. Examples: 50 S. Court St., but if you leave off the house number, you'd write South Court Street.
- **affect, effect** — Ninety-nine times out of 100, if the word you use is a verb, spell it with an "a," and if it is a noun, spell it with an "e." In these two usages, affect means to influence and effect means the result of an action — and those are by far the most common uses.
- **a.m., p.m.** — Recognize that 8 p.m. tonight is redundant. So, write 8 tonight, or 8 p.m. today. Better still: 8 p.m. Monday (refer to the day of the week).
- **City Council** — Capitalize when referring to a specific City Council, even if the name of the town is not given.
- **co-** — Sometimes it's followed by a hyphen, and sometimes it's not. When the prefix is part of a word indicating occupation, hyphenate, as in co-worker, co-owner. There are no hyphens when the letter "o" is doubled, as is cooperate and coordinate.
- **dimensions** — Use figures for all numbers that indicate height, weight, width, etc., even for numbers less than 10. Example: The book weighs 2 pounds.
- **directions and regions** — Capitalize words such as North and South if they refer to places you can stand and say, "I am standing in the ———." That means they are nouns referring to regions, and AP says capitalize them as such. When referring to compass directions, such as "I am walking north," they remain lower case.

- **essential clauses, essential phrases** — If you use the word “which” to introduce a phrase or clause, precede it with a comma. Do not precede the word “that” by a comma.
- **fewer, less** — Use fewer for things that you can count. Example: I have fewer quarters than you do. (*You can count: one quarter, two quarters, three quarters...*) Use less for things you cannot count. Example: I have less cash than you do. (*You don't say one cash, two cash, three cash...*)
- **governmental bodies** — Read this entry carefully to determine when to capitalize names of agencies and departments.
- **highway designations** — These bedevil many journalists, but they're easy. Capitalize U.S. Highway 89, or U.S. 89. Capitalize Utah Highway 33, but notice that you lowercase the “s” in state Highway 33.
- **Inc.** — Do not precede it with a comma.
- **it's, its** — “It's” is a contraction that means it is, or it has. “Its” means “belonging to it.” Whenever you must choose one or another in a sentence, try inserting the phrase “it is” or “it has.” If one of those pairs makes sense, then use it's.
- **lay, lie** — Not as tricky as it might seem. Remember that “lay” in the present tense, requires an object; in other words you can only “lay” something. The word “lie” in the present tense means recline on a horizontal plane. Examples in the present tense: I lay the book on the table. Now it lies there. In the past tense, lay becomes laid, and lie becomes lay.
- **months** — Never abbreviate months when they do not immediately precede a date. Example: We got married in September last year. However, when the name of a month immediately precedes a date, abbreviate it — but only if the month's name is six letters or longer. Example: We got married Aug. 6 last year. But, we were divorced March 5.
- **numerals** — This entry is a common source of confusion. Remember the rule of thumb: Spell out whole numbers below 10, and use figures for 10 and above. Typical examples: They had three sons and two daughters. They had a fleet of 10 station wagons and two buses. Now, having mastered the rule of thumb, read the exceptions to the rule.
- **plurals** — Note the unusual rule that when you form the plural of a proper noun that ends in a “y,” you usually add an “s,” as in Kennedys, Grammys, Emmys.
- **possessives** — The main AP exception to Strunk and White's *Elements of Style* involves forming the possessive of a singular proper noun that ends in “s.” AP says merely add an apostrophe. Examples: Otis' cookies, Amos' ice cream, Charles' chips. To make something that is singular into a possessive, add 's; to make something plural into a possessive, first make sure it is plural, usually by verifying that it ends in an “s,” and then add an apostrophe.
- **quotations in the news** — Do not change words in quotation marks. Those quote marks tell the reader, “This is exactly what was said.” Quote marks always appear outside a period, comma, semicolon and colon. When a full-sentence quotation is introduced or followed by attribution, place a comma between them. Examples: I said, “What the heck is going on?” ... “It's the state fair,” he said. One exception to the rule is that quotations that are in the form of a question do not need a question mark and a comma — merely a question mark. Example: “What's going on?” he asked. [Note the lower case “h” in he.] When using a sentence fragment as a quotation, do not set it off with a comma unless the sentence requires one for proper grammar. Example: He said he felt “sicker than a dead frog [no comma here]” after he drank the expired milk.
- **second reference** — Well-known abbreviations are acceptable on second reference. Thus, Internal Revenue Service can become “the IRS” the second time you refer to it. Avoid using unfamiliar abbreviations.

- **state names** — Spell out all names of states in sentences unless they are preceded by a city, county or military base name. Then, according to the chart found with this listing, you abbreviate all state names EXCEPT the two states outside the Lower 48 and all continental states that have five or fewer letters in their names. The states that are never abbreviated in text: Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas and Utah. Abbreviated states are as follows:

Ala.	Fla.	Md.	Neb.	N.D.	Tenn.
Ariz.	Ga.	Mass.	Nev.	Okla.	Vt.
Ark.	Ill.	Mich.	N.H.	Ore.	Va.
Calif.	Ind.	Minn.	N.J.	Pa.	Wash.
Colo.	Kan.	Miss.	N.M.	R.I.	W.Va.
Conn.	Ky.	Mo.	N.Y.	S.C.	Wis.
Del.	La.	Mont.	N.C.	S.D.	Wyo.

- **temperature** — Use figures unless the temperature is zero. Examples: It's minus 5 degrees. I hope it warms to 9 or 10.
- **titles** — Capitalize formal titles immediately before a name, and do not separate the title from the name by a comma. Examples: I saw President Clinton. I got to meet Pope John Paul II. Titles that appear after a name or standing alone are ALMOST NEVER capitalized. If you're wondering about those exceptions, see AP, "nobility." Also note that sometimes a person's title is set off by commas. In those cases, it is lower case. If you're wondering when to use a comma between title and name, see "appositives," or just listen for the natural pause when you say the sentence aloud. If you pause, use a comma. Examples: The president, (PAUSE) George W. Bush, (PAUSE) ate a burger. President (NO PAUSE) George W. Bush got indigestion.
- **United States** — Abbreviate it as "U.S." only as an adjective before a noun, as in U.S. hockey team, U.S. economy and U.S. bonds. Otherwise, spell it out: I love the United States.
- **vice president** — No hyphen.
- **weather term** — Recognize that blizzard, cyclone, gale and hurricane have specific meanings.
- **years** — To indicate a decade, add an "s" to the first year in the decade. Example: In the 1960s, the Beatles ruled the music scene. If you abbreviate this, do it this way: In the '60s, the Beatles... Remember that years are never spelled out. Even at the beginning of a sentence, use a figure: 1968 was a good year.

Common Spelling Mistakes:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accommodate (two Cs, two Ms) • adviser (AP likes an "e" in it) • afterward (no S at the end) • all ready (everyone is prepared; all are ready) and already (completed action) • altar (table in church) and alter (modify) • amid (has no ST at the end) • among (has no ST at the end) • busing (transporting by bus) and bussing (osculating, i.e, kissing) • calendar • canceled, cancellation (these are AP's preferences) • embarrass (two Rs and two Ss) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • indiscreet (meaning imprudent) • indiscrete (meaning not separated into parts) • judgment (there is no "judge" in judgment) • knowledge • livable • nuclear • officeholder (one word) • percent (spell out, do not use symbol) • principal (meaning primary or major, as in the title of the high-ranking school official) • principle (a fundamental law or doctrine) • privilege (no "d") |
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